



Education Committee

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Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Iowa Schools

By: Education Committee

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Position Statement:

The State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council supports the implementation of equity-focused teaching practices for licensed kindergarten through twelfth-grade educators and administrators across the state of Iowa and the incorporation of diverse perspectives in our curriculum.

Position

It is the position of the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council, the voice of Iowa's youth, to support the requirement of equity-focused professional development for licensed kindergarten through twelfth-grade educators in the state of Iowa, and incorporating representative, historically accurate, and diverse perspectives into the K-12 Curriculum Standards. This professional development should be a part of the renewal and review process for teachers and administrators. While also developing statewide training programs for implicit bias, restorative disciplinary practices, and other areas of cultural responsiveness, this professional development model should add a commitment to equity and inclusion to the existing educator evaluation process.

Rationale

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are instrumental in creating a content-rich and supportive learning environment for Iowa K-12 students. Currently, the Iowa Core Curriculum Standards, Iowa Teaching Standards and Criteria, and the Iowa Code 281 lack sufficient guidelines surrounding the importance of DEI and cultural responsiveness in Iowa schools. *Cultural Responsiveness* is defined by the New York State Board of Education as, "To value diversity and promote respect for all students' and staff's cultures and contexts[...] disrupt patterns and systems of inequity to promote all students' academic success and well-being" [9]. Cultural responsiveness in teaching and administrative leadership can have a positive impact on mitigating inequity within a school district. This practice can take the form of revised disciplinary practices, creating an inclusive learning environment, and hiring representative staff. After the implementation of equity-focused professional development, an environment would be fostered which offers students of all socioeconomic backgrounds, races, and genders an opportunity to achieve success [1]. All of these goals have the intent of mitigating achievement disparities by supporting the unique needs of all students.

The state of Iowa does not serve its students equitably. In 2019, the State of Iowa School Performance Profiles, which were categorized by race, socioeconomic status, and ability, showed that Black/African American, low-income, and IEP students perform at significantly lower levels and exhibit lower levels of academic growth than majority students [2]. Also in 2019, the state performance report documented that Black students accounted for 30.3% of school arrests, despite representing only 6.4% of the total student population in Iowa [2]. These disproportionalities are symptoms of disciplinary, instructional, and curriculum-related structures that apply inequitably to Iowa students.

Given the disproportionate makeup of disciplined and arrested students, a reformed approach to discipline is an issue of equity. Culturally responsive disciplinary practices include restorative justice: a model of conflict resolution focused on empathy building and growth. Restorative justice practices have been shown to be a superior option to the current “zero-tolerance” employed in many schools, given their focus on improvement rather than punishment [3]. Students that are disciplined using Restorative Justice techniques avoid the juvenile justice system that would make them more likely to fail in school or re-enter the criminal justice system later in life [3].

Educators who are trained in culturally responsive methods like cultural matching (incorporating student’s cultures into the classroom to support their learning), implicit bias, and collaborative inter-group learning contribute to a climate of equity within a classroom [4]. With students from a variety of backgrounds, it is important for Iowa educators to approach their instruction inclusively. The current systems for educator and administrator evaluation in Iowa do not assess equitable practices in the classroom [5]. Changing the state-wide standards for education to require equitable teacher training would contribute to a cultural shift within schools towards one that values diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Iowa Core Curriculum standards also fail to recognize Equity and Cultural Responsiveness as universal values in core content [6]. Without the guidance or provision of equitable content for grades K-12, the curriculum is prone to be unrepresentative of the student population and is not prevented from including inequitable content. According to the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy’s Center for Research and Reform in Education, curriculum-related policy from a beyond-local level can vastly improve the quality of content taught across a region [7]. Additionally, diverse content in school curriculum has been shown to increase student proficiency and reduce achievement disparities [8]. Incorporating representative content into Iowa Core curriculum standards is imperative to making schools across Iowa more equitable.

Recommended Action

If officially supported by SIYAC, we propose the following preliminary steps towards equitable education standards. SIYAC should recommend the necessary addition of cultural responsiveness training programs to the Iowa Administrative Code, IAC 281 Chapter 83, under Teacher and Administrator Quality Programs. The enactment of House File 2229 that amends IAC 272.2.1.c (2020) is critical in 2020. It is also imperative to add restorative justice training and cultural responsiveness training to IAC 281 Chapter 79: Standards for Practitioner and Administrator Preparation Programs. SIYAC should also recommend the adoption of Rule Making ARC 5148C that amends IAC 281 Chapter 79: Standards for Practitioner and Administrator Preparation Programs. We also find it obligatory for the addition of a commitment to Equitable Instruction and Culturally Responsive Curriculum in the Iowa Core Universal Values, and an equitability assessment and ranking should be added to the Iowa School Performance Report. Lastly, an amendment to The Iowa Model Educator Evaluation System should prioritize the inclusion of cultural responsiveness.

Regards,
Education Committee
State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council

Sources

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